

PROF. ERASMUS THING
STILL LIVES!!



abandon

ALBION is a journal of Awful Aspect, purporting to be a source of information on board wargaming, Diplomacy and allied interests. To date it has bent your eye on or about the first day of each month, and this will continue for a while; however ominous changes are afoot - see the editorial, if I remember to announce them. Subscriptions to ALBION are presently 10p per issue, plus appropriate postage costs (first class in England). Postal Diplomacy games are reported in COURIER, the section of ALBION created for that purpose. There are no game openings available at present, although there is a waiting list if you want to add your name by application to the editor - Don Turnbull, 6 St. George's Avenue, Timperley, Cheshire, England. Players awaiting a game are expected to subscribe to ALBION until such time as the game starts; when involved in a game, players receive both ALBION and COURIER free, having paid the game fee, until such time as either they are eliminated or the game ends; they pay postage costs throughout.

Contributions to ALBION are welcome - please submit as far in advance of a printing date as possible.

The editor doesn't necessarily share the views of contributors as expressed in letters or articles. Indeed, to liken the editor to an inert vegetable, having no views at all, would be unfair to inert vegetables everywhere, and we have no wish to incur the wrath of the Race Relations Board.

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The front cover this time is by Pam Palmer, whose proposed cover for the birthday issue got held up for various reasons. The back cover is taken care of by Ian Livingstone. To both these people, and to our other contributors, our sincere thanks.

Who let my wife read the editorial in issue 30??? Come on - who are you??

Editorial.

There seems precious little to write about this time, which will elicit a profound sigh of relief from you all. I must first apologise about the back cover for issue 30, however. The position was simply this - Pam got involved in various other things (like work, and other fruitless occupations) at publication time, and wasn't able to get the promised cover done. By way of recompense and atonement, she has produced the cover on the front of this issue, which depicts our old pal Prof. Thing at work in his study. I am reliably informed that the article hanging out of his jacket pocket is an intimate item of female apparel, depicting the 'with it' nature of the old boy's character. I confess the item in question leaves me baffled for a more accurate description, but that only goes to show how little I know about these things. Honest.....

There is no Diplomacy at all in this issue, which some will regard as a bad thing. However it continues to be a policy of ALBION to print such Diplomacy material when available, and contributions in this area, as in others, are invited. Of particular interest would be articles on the play of the game - strategies to be pursued, diplomatic skullduggery to be sought after etc. If a player in a current game would like to write an article, but fears that in doing so his policy in the game was getting an unwelcome airing to other players, then I will accept articles under a pseudonym, providing I know who actually writes them.

I am presently considering the future of ALBION. Things are building up nicely at present, but I wonder whether it is right to go on churning out specialist material to a specialised audience, or whether to try to expand into a more general field. It would be possible, I suppose, to get the magazine printed professionally, and to sell it on the open market. This would demand the removal of most, if not all, of the informality of the present publication; however it would also result in a broadening of the games hobby, and an increase in awareness among the public in general. I believe that England desperately lacks general guidance and information on leisure activities of all types - principally games - and that a considerable market exists for a professional magazine (perhaps associated with game manufacturing and designing facilities, and agencies for current games) which deals comprehensively and exclusively with such activities. Gone are the days when hobbies are considered the preserve of the young - as we gain more and more time, and (so the Government tells us) more and more spare cash, so we require guidance in the use of this time and the allocation of this cash. Vast sections of the public need education in this respect, as do the education authorities themselves in terms of educational games and other aids to learning. The whole area seems ripe for development, and the thought crosses my mind from time to time that an organisation such as ours (not specifically AHIKS, but the general game-aware community as exemplified by the readers of ALBION, Miniature Warfare etc.) could play a prominent role in this development.

Vague dreams, maybe. Nonetheless I would be interested to hear the views of readers on such ideas. We need to create a vast pool of information and of ideas for expansion.

I hope you will forgive these mutterings, and that perhaps something might sooner or later come of them. In the meantime, I hope you enjoy this issue and find something in it to interest you.

Don Turnbull.

GRUNT.

Published in Strategy and Tactics magazine issue 26. As part of a six-issue subscription to S&T, this issue would cost 71p; as a back issue, it will cost £1.40.

Designer: John Kramer, with John Young and Red Simonsen.

Map and components: John Kramer.

Presentation.

The entire game arrives loose with S&T 26.

The unit counters are die-cut! Superb! These are the first die-cut counters to be supplied with a game from S&T, and are clear and attractively designed. When removing Avalon Hill counters from their mounting sheet, there is often a risk of tearing since they are so firmly held; this is not the case here, the counters being easily removed with no risk of damage. However this is a two-edged sword, and in many cases counters will work themselves loose in the mail, so you would be well advised to check the envelope for unit counters lurking in its recesses before consigning it to the litter bin.

Insufficient planning was devoted to the actual 'distribution' of counters. Some VC counters mentioned in the game are present only in reduced number - for instance some scenarios require two 'records' counters, yet only one is supplied. Yet there are no spare VC counters (although there are some spare US counters, in addition to some US counters whose use we never did ascertain.) Also, the 'casualty' counters are insufficient in number and, in our opinion, improperly designed. We would prefer to have seen more of them, and to have had a distinction between 'killed in action' and 'wounded in action' on the counters, perhaps using a front/back method.

The mapsheet is on slightly thicker paper than usual, and a dirty yellow colour, rather than white, seems to be standard for this quality paper. This gives it a slightly unkempt appearance, which isn't counterbalanced by the terrain features etc. The latter are particularly gruesome, although perfectly distinguishable; the map looks a nightmare, which is fair enough considering the game is set in the Vietnamese jungle.

Colouring the mapsheet is recommended prior to mounting it on a rigid playing surface. Once again, there is no grid for postal play on the map. At the risk of tedious repetition, why not? It's a darned sight easier to do at the printing stage than later, and to send out maps with the grid already printed would guarantee uniformity among players. It must be a frustrating experience to spend time printing a grid onto a map, only to find, later, that the grid you are using doesn't correspond to that of anyone else.

Presentation quite normal, then, with the added bonus of the die-cut counters. It is worth noting that a sheet of Avalon Hill counters costs something like 75 cents; you are getting the entire game, plus a magazine, for only three times this amount. We sincerely hope S&T continue to send out die-cut counters, although how they can do it at the price is quite beyond us.

The rules.

The whole concept of this game is unusual. It is set at company level, so the units represent very few men. Each turn is six minutes long, the game lasting one hour of game time (rather more in playing time, of course). The rules must therefore be very specialised, and for this reason alone they require careful study, even for a relatively experienced player.

Unfortunately there are other reasons why careful and constant reading of the rules is necessary, the principle one being poor continuity in the text. On first sight, the rules seem quite straightforward; however, when you start to play the game, it isn't particularly clear where you start in the rules, or (in the case of advanced games and optional rules) to what extent one rule clarifies, replaces or reinforces another.

We wouldn't rate the rules themselves as particularly fierce, although they approach the complexity of, say, ANZIO, when they are all used. However the poor construction of the text makes it quite an onerous task to get to grips with the game, and makes the play itself frustrating in constant reference to that section of the rules which you have seen somewhere but just can't find at the moment.

One would expect the rules for such an unusual game to contain some novel features, and such is the case. It would take too long to go into them all, but a few examples might serve to demonstrate. First, units defend, not with their own defence factor, but that of the hexagon they occupy (i.e. the factor depends on the terrain); this defence factor applies no matter how many units are in the particular stack - usually one only, for obvious reasons. Units fire on a line-of-sight principle; however there is a 'kill-zone' which extends through the target up to the maximum range of the weapon, so it is possible to shoot two men by virtue of one standing behind the other, so to speak. VC units spend most of the time hidden (upside-down); nothing particularly unusual in that, except that many of them are merely dummy counters, which move around just like normal units, and the US can spend valuable time chasing, or bombing, dummy counters when the real trouble-makers are departing quietly in another direction. The US player gets points for killing VC units; however he loses points for wounding or killing a peasant. Since he can't tell which is which when they are upside-down, firing on anything, particularly early in the game before any identification has been carried out, is quite a risky business. Wounded US soldiers have to be picked up by medical units, which are usually at the wrong end of the board when required.

There are, of course, many other novel features. They have obviously been given considerable thought, and it is a pity the same level of thought wasn't applied to the structure of the rules.

Because of the poor layout of the rules, it isn't immediately clear that there are quite a few gaps, and important ones. One glaring error struck us fairly soon - there are snipers, but they have no combat factor, and their use isn't described in the rules; unless you invent a rule to cover the omission, all they can do is sit around in trees watching the US go by. As familiarity with the play is gained, other omissions become clear, and by the time we got to the fully-fledged game with all optionals, there were as many sources of confusion as there were clear rules. The list below is only a drop in the ocean, merely giving a few examples of unclear points, omissions etc. No doubt there are others.

1. US units should land upside-down; otherwise the VC hard-core units can pick on the helicopter with the most juicy target on board (e.g. the artillery forward observer). It is unrealistic to expect VC, no matter how hard their core, to select for their target the helicopter with a particular man on board, before the thing has even landed.
2. Artillery centre of fire can shift four squares in a turn; however it isn't stated how the fire of the guns can be divided in this case - do you merely apply half-factor, or is it possible to be more selective in the proportions of the fire allocated to the two centres of impact?

3. It is never entirely clear when the US player can turn over VC units. The military units are no problem, since they turn over to fire. But the procedure for US investigation of other units appears unclear at best and downright contradictory at worst. To our way of thinking, a dummy counter should be exposed for what it is as soon as it is in sight.
4. The air strike rules aren't clear. It says 'select 8 hexes and roll the die four times'. For each hex? Well, we suppose so, but it doesn't actually say that. Also it isn't clear just when the US can have an air strike, or how many.
5. The various orders of battle etc. are very confusing. The US options for deployment are interesting, but there is no recommendation as to which VC oob should be used (one US option, for instance, awards a high number of points to the capture of VC records, yet the VC need not have chosen an oob which involved a record counter. So if this happens, the US intelligence was at fault, presumably; but it just isn't clear).

And so on. We have twelve major points listed, but there seems little point in listing them all here; for a start the list is probably not comprehensive, and also these things are so much a matter of personal interpretation. In summary, probably - in fact certainly - the worst set of rules we have ever seen from S&T.

The play.

The game situation is an intriguing one, and the VC player in particular gets a very interesting problem to cope with - in deception, underhand skullduggery and sharp practice (I cannot resist the comment that Malcolm played VC, since the qualities required seemed so much in line with his own). The US player is faced with a more frustrating problem, being hampered in almost every respect - shortage of time, slow movement through the thick forests, vulnerability of helicopters, lack of information, risk of killing civilians etc. etc.

There is a certain amount of record keeping, particularly using all the optional rules (units of fire etc.), but this is quite palatable and by no means onerous.

Game length is probably 2-2½ hours, plus set-up time.

If players are prepared to lend their own interpretations to the rules, and to be inventive about filling in the gaps, then the play is interesting and enjoyable. Clearly, however, the latter factor depends on the former to a great extent, and in fact our own opinions are divided, Malcolm liking the game and accepting the shortcomings, me finding that the shortcomings in the rules are too great a handicap to allow me to enjoy the play. We will have to leave this as a difference of opinion.

Summary.

Let it be made quite clear: there is no reason why the gaps in the rules could not be filled by players, in which case an enjoyable game is possible. For instance, we gave snipers a combat factor of 1, added 2 to the die roll to account for improved expertise, and didn't turn the counter over unless a US unit actually came alongsides. This sort of thing is no doubt possible for all the other missing or indeterminate rulings.

BUT we do think the game a failure because of the rules. To our way of thinking, there is no excuse for poor layout of the rules, since that betokens insufficient play-testing, which is itself inexcusable. No matter how many amateur 'experts' apply their own rules interpretations, the game should be judged on the rules as printed.

We are sure that the basis for a most interesting and novel game exists here. If someone were to re-write the rules completely around the existing board and unit counters, then we might have a real winner. Certainly this sort of warfare adds a new dimension, hitherto unexplored, to gaming, and this fact is welcome in itself.

However as it stands we must down-rate GRUNT. Were it on sale as a game in its own right, rather than being included in the magazine, we would recommend you did not buy it. As it happens, many readers will be getting that issue of S&T anyway, so perhaps the recommendation isn't worth all that much. We think it has all the makings of a first-class game, completely ruined by bad planning and poor compilation of the rules.

Suitability for postal play.

The whole essence of this type of warfare would be realised by playing this game through the mail, using a monitor (absolutely essential) as intermediary. Grunt would be a very suitable postal game indeed.

Grid system: Letters A to HH along the north edge.
Numbers 1 to 48 diagonally south-west to north-east, starting in the south-east.
Road berm leaves map in squares HH28 and M12, and makes turns in squares M15, V15 and V28.

Malcolm Watson.

Don Turnbull.

* * * * *

Other new games from S&T.

Strategy I, Kursk, France 1940.

All the above new games dropped through my letterbox in the last three weeks. Perhaps a brief account of them might be of interest, plus recommended grids for postal play.

All have die-cut unit counters and maps on thick stock. France 1940 is included with S&T magazine issue 27 (see review elsewhere in the issue), the other two being new Test Series Games. France 1940 is the game to be produced by Avalon Hill in Spring 1972, which makes it the most anticipated game ever. Strategy I has coloured map sheets, which makes a nice change from black and white, and might save me a bit in felt pens.

Kursk and France 1940 don't look particularly remarkable - this is not to say they look poor, since there are a few novel features in them; indeed the rule books are so similar as to be almost identical. However their arrival has been completely eclipsed by the appearance of the long-awaited Strategy I, and I confess Kursk and France 1940 have merely been filed away while Strategy I has taken the lion's share of the examination.

Strategy I is a veritable monster of a game. Two map sheets, each the size of the AH Stalingrad board, which can be joined together in two configurations. No less than 1020 unit counters (actually eight identical sets of units in different colours). A rule book that would be the envy of the compilers of the Great American Novel. The rules are in modular form, rather like the modular Blitzkrieg, mentioned in ALBION 30 and the fore-runner of this game. There are 36 modules in all, each having a number of sub-sections. Thus the zones of control module has five sections - active, semi-active, inactive, fluid and unilateral. These are, of course, mutually exclusive, in the sense that you would only use one part of the module in a particular game.

There are seventeen scenarios, ranging from Ancient Warfare to a World War III, all described in complete detail together with modules recommended for use.

All in all, the game looks like Son of Confrontation with elements of Modular Blitz, plus a whole host of new and fascinating details. Clearly a labour of love and a tremendous triumph for the designers (John Young, Jim Dunnigan, Red Simonsen and Steve Patrick). The work they have put into this project defies the imagination, as does the satisfaction they must have at the completion.

From our humble point of view, I wonder if players are going to play the game in anything like its most complex form; there is just so much in it! However everyone will buy it, as indeed they should, as a collector's item without parallel in the history of board wargaming.

Suggested grid systems.

Strategy I (same for both boards).

Letters A to WW along the top edge.

Numbers 1 to 56 south-west to north-east, starting in the north-west.

Map 1. Chessex C1 is NN34. Gastonny G2 is O27.
Ispanos I1 is V42.

Map 2. Weidong W1 is W16. Rasha R1 is BB44.
Ubo U1 is NN26.

I suggest the intermediate sea squares as the best place to put the letters and numbers for the grid - there is precious little room anywhere else.

Kursk. Letters A to XX along the east or west edge, starting in the north.
Numbers 1 to 57 north-west to south-east, starting in the south-west.
Bryansk is J30, Kursk is Y32, Krasnograd is VV13.

France 1940. White ink or Letraset is necessary, since the map is bordered in black.

Letters A to OO along the south edge, starting in the east.

Numbers 1 to 42 north-east to south-west, starting in the south-east.

Metz is G12. Sedan is P21. Lille is CC36.

Note that, in France 1940, I have elected to use a 'non-standard' grid system. This is because, using the 'standard' system, certain numbers would never be used. This is quite an important factor for those using Letraset for the grid, since sheets of letters and numbers aren't cheap, and they always seem to give just too few of the number you really want. Normandy came into the same category, for the same sort of reason.

ALBION invites articles on these new games, particularly on Strategy I. No payment - just the glory of having your name in print, for what that's worth. Of course, a review of Strategy I would be nice, but it would be impossible to play-test every part of Strategy I within the next decade or so, and therefore we will have to be content with skimming the surface.

Don Turnbull.

**** It's always nice to have two different views on one subject. Charles Appleby has obviously decided to form his own interpretations of the GRUNT rules, and wanted to pass them on to readers. djt ****

GRUNT - Interpretations and Game Report.

by Charles Appleby.

In my experience, most games that have gaps in the rules also have proportionately large gaps in the structure of the game. As suggested in the June ALBION, the rules of GRUNT are not complete, but I have played a couple of interesting games using a few simple modifications and additions, which I thought other owners of GRUNT might like to know about and comment on. These do, in this case, integrate very well into the existing game structure.

1. Impose a penalty on the US player for cancelling air strikes, perhaps giving 5 points each to the NLF for the first three and 10 each for additional ones. This prevents the US player ordering an air strike every turn and then cancelling the majority of them.
2. I presume that the rules on air strikes intend there to be two methods of obtaining them, firstly to pre-plan at a minimum of three turns away, or secondly to gamble on getting one earlier by throwing a die. I suggest that a throw of 1, 2 or 3 means that the strike comes on that turn, a throw of 4 means turn 3, 5 means turn 4 and 6 means turn 5. This spreads the distribution more evenly.
3. I find the procedures for turning up dummy counters etc. rather unclear and suggest the following.
 - a. If a dummy counter is given casualties by air strike, artillery fire, helicopter fire or ground reconnaissance-by-fire, it must be revealed and removed, but not if merely pinned.
 - b. A cache in similar circumstances is declared as not being people and not affected unless KIA is thrown by an air strike, as in the rules.
 - c. If any of the conditions of a. apply when the unit is also in the line of sight in open ground, neither treeline nor broken/berm, the dummy counter is removed even if only pinned.
4. Do helicopters for evacuating wounded have door gunners? What about ammunition supply helicopters? I would imagine only the latter.
5. It seems logical that as long as the number of available helicopters is not exceeded a platoon could be evacuated and re-dropped. On evacuation door gunners only fire on the way out, to avoid hitting units preparing to embark. Presumably the helicopters pick up in line, and they must stay on the ground for a whole turn, during which time ground units may move at half rate to allow for embarkation. If at this stage any units become pinned by crossing existing fire lines, I suggest that either the evacuation could be aborted, preventing the helicopters from firing on the way out, or the pinned unit (or doubly pinned if not near a medic or commander) could take one extra casualty as a penalty. Obviously if any of the units was pinned previously the evacuation could not be attempted. The troops then spend one turn in the air before being allowed to land again.
6. As the Cobras do not have to land, it would probably be reasonable to give them a defence factor of at least 1, $1\frac{1}{2}$ if over broken terrain, 2 if over a building in broken terrain. By the way - how low do they fly?

7. Mortar platoons. Allow these to operate either as infantry with a factor of 1, or giving mortar fire with a factor of 2. A range of 6-16 squares could be applicable for mortars. (Comments?) The platoon HQ of the unit it is supporting should play the role of the FAO, with the same minimum distance regulations, except that he has infinite line of sight. This enables mortars to give unobserved fire via the platoon commander and mortar platoon commander. For the first shot at a target reduce the factor to 1 to allow for ranging up, unless they can see the target themselves. Fire only once per turn each.
8. Use of platoon HQs. Use them to observe mortar fire as in 7. Perhaps forbid them from firing, but use to co-ordinate the platoon in the same sort of way as the leader counters control the VC. All American units could be restricted to a maximum distance apart (except ARVN Rangers), e.g. 1 move between units. Thus the spacing varies with terrain. Each platoon could be strung out with the HQ somewhere in the line. However if the HQ is eliminated the maximum distance is reduced to 4 movement factors (1 square apart in forests). Do not allow re-coordination with other platoon HQs - only the company commander can substitute for a platoon HQ after a two-turn delay. With this option give the platoon and company HQ only three lives instead of six - the same for the FAO teams and medic teams.
9. Give the NLF the same points as the US if they can capture US ammo. Reduce it in proportion to the amount of ammo left in the supply.
10. Improved Positions counters. Units can only be counted as doubled in defence if the player remembers to place one of these counters. They only affect individual units - units subsequently moving onto an improved positions square obviously do not benefit. If VC units, not porters, place an improved positions counter on themselves and a cache (1 or 2 moves?) the cache counts doubled defence against an air strike etc. However an improved positions counter placed directly on a cache for deception purposes is not valid. The same applies to dummy counters but not to civilians. Improved positions counters should be placed face down by the NLF.
11. Ambush counters. Only one can be placed per NLF firing unit per turn, but allow more than one unit to fire at a US unit violating an ambush counter. This stops lines of obvious ambushes halting US movement. Do not allow a unit both to place an ambush and improve its position in the same turn.
12. Do not allow the US player more supply units than there are counters in the game (4).
13. Perhaps allow US to airlift out VC dead and wounded who are captured, thus enabling the American to end the game before the 10th turn by evacuating all troops (see 5) and gaining extra points for abandoned VC only if a medic unit goes and stays away as well (one medic unit for every six VC casualties). Shooting down of evacuation helicopter in any evacuation results in units taking casualties as stated plus one extra wounded. Further attempts must then be made to evacuate the remaining forces (count single pinning only), counting 20 points to the NLF for any abandoned helicopter pilots. A medic team takes 1 turn to extract a wounded or dead pilot from wreckage.

14. Optionally, the NLF player must declare before the incoming helicopters fire, whether or not he is firing on them. Classify this fire as either light or heavy. This rule enables the US player to adjust his fire-power to the immediate problem. In reality this fire would take place simultaneously.
15. Only the company commander personally on the spot may order a helicopter that has just landed a supply unit to remove it again. This limits the use of supplies as fire support excuses. Also limit the number of medical helicopters landing to one per square of casualties.
16. Procedure for artillery fire in a forest. Allow the observer to move the fire one square nearer to him per shot, from a maximum distance of six squares away. Also allow him lateral fire movement in the forest only if unpinning. Under the existing rules, as I understand them, it is very difficult to commence fire in a forest otherwise. Once a square has been under artillery fire, allow the platoon HQs and FAOs to call down fire again on this square with no loss of time, distance of movement of fire irrespective. On the first shot of unobserved fire, if the US player wishes, he can fire phosphorus for smoke only to avoid killing US troops.

Game report.

A report on a 2/3-complete action against Peter Bush, who played NLF. This was the second game we had tried.

The initial platoon plus artillery observer landed on the edge of the wood in the south-west corner, giving heavy fire into two treeline squares as they came down, killing two civilians! Meanwhile an air strike was taking place on the west side of the south-east forest. 3 VC units received heavy casualties and an ammunition dump exploded - suspicions confirmed! The first platoon advanced steadily into the forest, NLF units retiring without a fight.

On turn three a pre-planned air strike hit the same area again. The defenders were so stunned that they had forgotten to improve their defences. Result - a total of 5 casualties on each unit! Platoon 2 landed on this edge of this shattered forest, preparing to move in. The mortar company landed on the far side of the south-west forest, helicopter fire killing a suspicious-looking porter.

The mortar company came under heavy, pinning fire from 3 VC units. Two Cobras with supplies had to be called in for fire support, while a steady advance was made in the south-east wood. The fire-power on the mortar platoon was overwhelming, more casualties being inflicted, this time by snipers. A medical 'copter was called in for more fire support, and to evacuate the wounded, and the combined fire power of six Cobras managed to silence the VC temporarily. But the first platoon had been badly held up by strongpoints and withdrew across the stream to allow for an air strike on the advancing foe.

Three dummy counters received the full blast of 288 points worth of fire-power in yet another air strike. By now the artillery had taken its toll on the snipers after the observer had gallantly raced into the open to spot. Slowly but surely the advance into the south-east wood continued, with mounting enemy losses and a successful body count on one lot. But ammo was running low.

At this point the game had to be stopped with points standing (allowing for abandonment of some south-east forest NLF casualties) of NLF 180, US 320, with several accessible but uncounted NLF casualties.

Conclusion.

We both thought this game tremendously enjoyable - a change from the somewhat dour AH games - as a result of the crafty (but legal) moves available to both sides. Playing with pieces upside down really is fun - especially when the defending strength is completely unknown.

Although I don't know much about Vietnam, I would imagine that this game covers nearly all important aspects of the fighting there.

The vast number of initial deployments available to both players allows for each game to be completely different - a definite change from what we have got used to in board games.

The rules of the game are basically good, although some clarity must be lost in trying to condense them as much as they are. It's nice to see the complexities of the optional rules so well integrated - the only thing needed is more casualty counters, with dead and wounded printed on them.

The amount of book-keeping is hardly noticeable, by the way.

Yet another 'Must' from S&T - keep it up! One could easily (and willingly) pay \$4 for a game as well structured as this.

Charles Appleby.

**** Looks like Charles and I disagree on this game, at first sight. Although perhaps not, really - it's just that I'm too lazy to think about rule interpretations, wanting everything served up on a plate. Many thanks, Charles, and looking forward to future articles. Did you say you had StrategyI??? djt ****

* * * * *

AND NOW

THE MOMENT FOR WHICH YOU HAVE ALL BEEN WAITING

THE RETURN OF AN INTELLECT THE LIKES OF WHICH YOU HAVE NEVER SEEN THE LIKES OF BEFORE

COMPLETELY UNTOUCHED BY HUMAN HAND

THE GAME OF LIFE.

by Professor Erasmus Thing Ph.D., T.W.i.T.

**** I hadn't seen my old ~~friend~~ friend Erasmus (Razzy for short) for some time. The last time he visited the ALBION offices was to complain at length about the fact that no-one was doing his Game Theory homework, and to make very heavy (and not entirely unwelcome) passes at the General Duties Secretary. Not necessarily in that order. The secretary developed a severe attack of the Wronskian matrices a few days later, and left. Neither had been seen for some months, although percolating through the grape-vine came rumours that the old Prof. was undertaking some advanced studies in feminine topology, and talked incessantly about arcs, regions and ~~nodes~~ nodes. Two days ago Razzy burst into the offices clutching a sheaf of papers, the contents of which are reproduced below. I was happy to see him again; like most people associated with ALBION, Razzy has a

fascination all his own; besides, he owes me money. It annoyed me somewhat to see him looking so fit, despite adventures of which a man half his age would have been ~~prodd~~ ashamed. He muttered some sage remark about rhino horn (is that another sort of matrix?) and departed with a wild gleam in his eye. djt ****

Ladies and Gentlemen. And others. It is some time since we met, and you still haven't done the homework. However we Things are of a forgiving nature and if the two of you at the back will stop what you are doing, and if the rest will stop watching and applauding, we will proceed.

I have been told by the editor that this magazine deals with simulation games. Yet you have yet to see the best simulation of them all - that of life itself. You at the back will presumably require no instruction, nor, to judge from the colour of your cheeks, will you ever require a simulation. However the rest of you clearly need some instruction, so prepare to be guided.

The game I am about to describe - if game it is - was invented by John Conway, a fellow mathematician at the University of Cambridge. In England, by the way. To play the game you need either a few large sheets of graph paper, or a board and flat counters in two colours as used for the game of Go. Other methods may suggest themselves to you, if you have any imagination at all. I am inclined to doubt this in the case of most of you, though the couple at the back appear to my uninstructed eye to be very very imaginative indeed.

The idea of the game is to start with a configuration of counters, or dots on graph paper, then apply Conway's laws to see how the pattern changes. The initial configuration could be likened to an organism which changes or adapts as the generations (successive applications of the rules) fly by. What happens to the initial organism is anyone's guess - it may flourish, die or perhaps attain a stable structure. The fascination of this game is its unpredictability.

Here are the rules. Each cell on the graph paper, or each dot on the Go board, has eight adjacent cells, four orthogonal and four diagonal. What happens to a particular cell is governed by the states of these eight neighbours.

- Rule 1A. A counter dies from isolation if it has no neighbouring counter, or only one.
- Rule 1B. A counter dies from suffocation if it has four or more neighbouring counters.
- Rule 2. A counter survives to the next generation if it has two or three neighbouring counters.
- Rule 3. A birth occurs in an empty cell if there are exactly three neighbouring counters.

Note, in connection with the 'births', that the old expression 'it takes two to tango' is now replaced with 'it takes three to tarantella'. An isolated couple dies, presumably of sheer boredom - something which many married men will recognise without a second glance. Those who are contemplating running off with the typist should find some consolation in this fact, as should those who somehow manage to live with two women at the same time.

An important point to recognise is that births and deaths take place simultaneously. A newly-born counter cannot assist in the suffocation of a neighbour in the same turn, for instance.

Conway recommends the following playing procedure (using GO counters):

1. Start with a pattern of black counters.
2. Locate dying counters (rule 1) and place another black counter on top of each.
3. Locate vacant spaces where births occur and fill them with white counters (rule 3).
4. CHECK for mistakes - very important.
5. Remove all 'double' black counters, and replace single white counters with black.

You should now have the first generation of the life history of your initial pattern. Just repeat the procedure, producing successive generations, until the pattern dies, attains stability, or starts to oscillate. No, not osculate - there's a limit even to this simulation, you know.

And that's it, really. Try it - you will find it fascinating.

I suppose I will have to do some of the work for you. On two separate pages (14 and 15) you will see one or two examples which I will now discuss.

Starting on page 14, then, we have a few of the most common stable patterns, with the names which have been coined for them. Clearly these can occur in combination - four beehives, arranged in a symmetrical pattern, form a honey farm, predictably enough. One particular pattern we know of bakes a string of loaves, so is called the baker.

The glider is unusual. It performs what we mathematicians call a glide reflection, hence the name, so you can stop looking for wings and thermals. The stages are as indicated. When the game was first invented, Conway wondered whether there existed a pattern which would grow without limit, and indeed offered a handsome prize to anyone finding such a pattern. The winner (who of course cribbed the idea from me) discovered a pattern which continually launched gliders of the nature shown, and hence proved that it was possible to have an infinitely repeating pattern. There are now quite a few known 'glider guns'. There is even a device which eats gliders, although this cannot be recommended for those with a delicate digestion.

Further down page 14 there is the Cheshire Cat. Readers are invited to follow its life. You will find that it disappears except for a grin, which is nice, then the grin vanishes leaving a paw-print behind as mute evidence. This is quite a short cycle - try it. Then there is the harvester; it moves diagonally upwards as shown, leaving behind stable blocks which could fancifully be called sheaves of wheat.

Turning now to page 15, a few simple shapes are followed through a few generations. The first dies soon - it looked a bit feeble, I always said. The next two both attain stability, the first in the form of a block, the second as a beehive.

Then we have the first pattern so far examined which eventually becomes bistable - i.e. it oscillates between one state and another. This is on two lines of the page, by the way. The final shape, traffic lights (so called because it is formed of four 'blinkers', a blinker being merely three dots in a straight orthogonal line) flashes from one state to the other for ever.

Finally the letter H, which I put in to examine the future of Harold Wilson (or indeed anyone whose name begins with H). You will see that dear Harold hasn't much future in politics. As little, in fact, as the editor of this rag for printing this bit.

SOME COMMON STABLE PATTERNS



BEEHIVE



BOAT



SHIP



LOAF



POND



SNAKE



TAD



BARGE

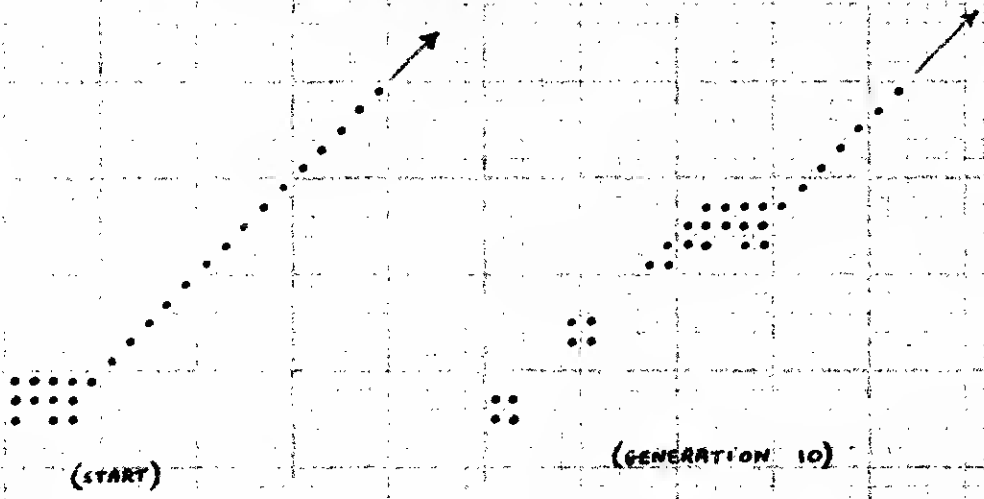
THE GLIDER

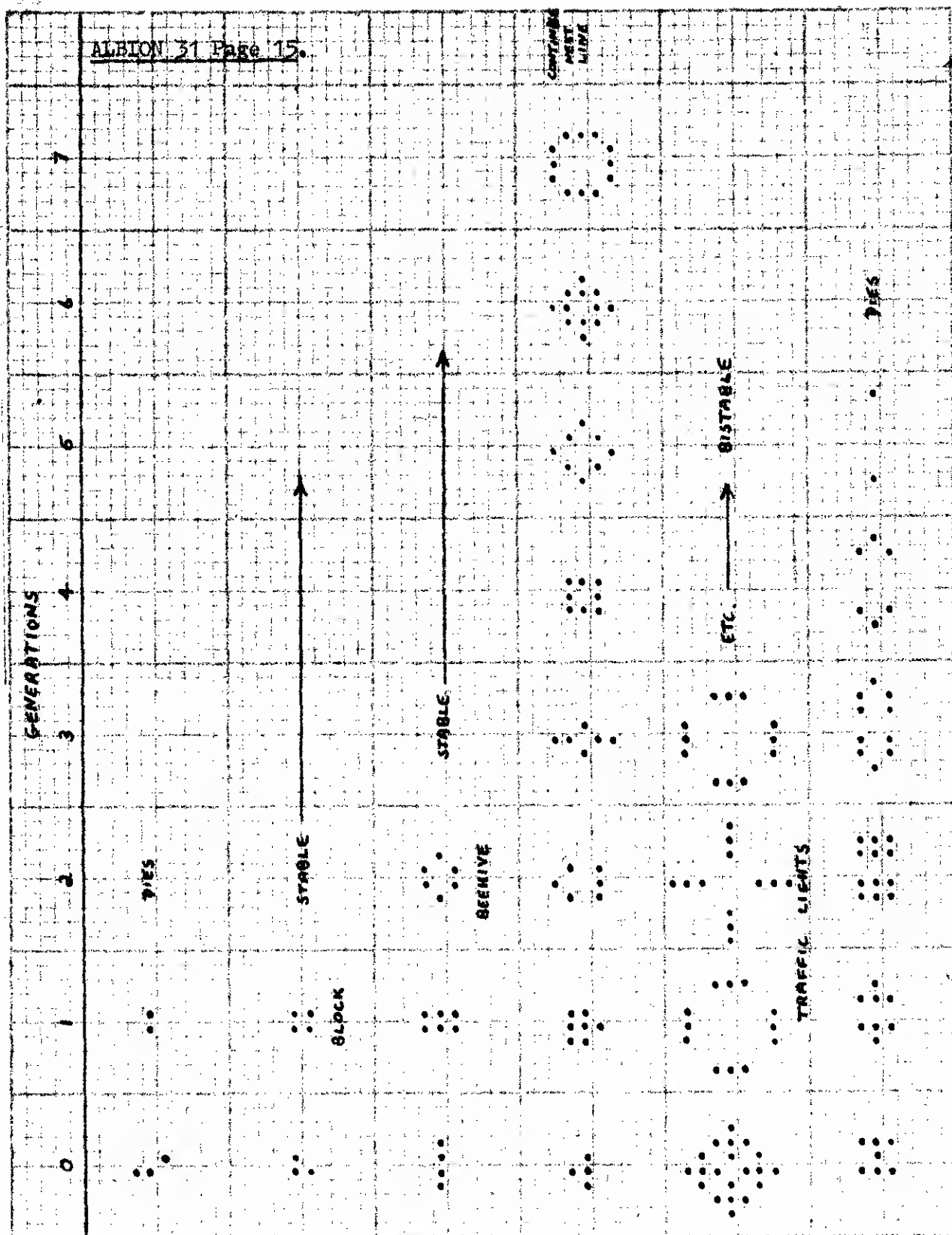


THE CHEESIRE CAT



THE HARVESTER





The fate of individual letters or combinations of letters has always intrigued me. What happens, for instance, to the ubiquitous initials DJT? To learn this result would cause many ALBION subscribers to withdraw their cash in a hurry, I warrant.

A fake business for predicting the future could be set up. Ask a young couple to write their initials in a dot pattern; then operate on the pattern with the rules. If the two patterns grow apart, or die, then there's no future for this pair. But if the two sets of initials merge, and perhaps form a stable, or oscillating, condition, one can imagine the couple leaving the emporium starry-eyed clutching each other, having paid vast sums of money to the magician who so accurately predicted their compatibility.

Football team managers might want to predict the performance of this or that combination of players by assembling their initials in dot form and following through the generations. Fanciers at dog tracks might while away the time between races having a look at the pattern of the name of the next fancied runner.

All these are, of course, trivial applications of the game. However readers are invited to try a few experiments of their own, and submit the results for publication if they are in any way remarkable. Keep the initial pattern fairly simple, I warn you, and check each step carefully!

The more serious applications of this game, and the theory that lies behind it, lies in the realms of higher mathematics and philosophy, and I won't bore you with it. You wouldn't understand, anyway - you can't even follow simple lectures on game theory.

However, just take this thought home and have a look at it. Can you imagine an electrical circuit which was capable of repairing itself? Or a circuit which would wire up any specified new network? A machine which would roam through a store, picking up parts and assembling reproductions of itself, or even assembling new machines? How much power has the human, anyway?

An English Sunday newspaper recently ran a column on Conway and the new game, and siezed on this aspect with the scare-value avidity which only newspapermen can achieve. The photograph of Conway in the paper was carefully graded and textured, with plenty of horrific effect, so that Conway looked like Frankenstein made up for something and in one of his liverish moods, peering with satanic glee into a computer output display screen on which his dots were swimming, and presumably cackling things to himself. The paper says 'It is a game which requires you to play God' - of all the bumptious unprofessional nonsense.

At the highest level, then, the game of Life represents something which no-one really understands. At the lowest level it is an elaborate (and rather lengthy) way of solitaire doodling. Choose where you fit in between.

But don't avoid the game - if only you have a crack at a few simple shapes.

Talking of simple shapes reminds me - the dear lady will be waiting, and I have much work to do. Be good until I see you again. And - oh yes - you two at the back; please could you go over that last bit again, but more slowly.....

Prof. Erasmus Thing.

**** Readers are invited to submit their Life game results.
Each generation must be shown; and please don't send
complex ones - I won't have room to print many. djt ****

GOLF GAMES IN PROFUSION.

an ALBION Triple Review.

Rationale and preamble.

Although, as most people know, ALBION is concerned principally with wargames and wargaming, there seems no good reason why other games should not be given some exposure from time to time. To date, the category 'other games' has been filled with articles on chess and a brief mention of the Avalon Hill Stock Market game and the railroading game C&O B&O. Oh yes - and the sex game, which elicited no response whatsoever. More chess will appear from time to time, and we hope that the same will be true of other games, of skill content, in a reasonable proportion.

The idea of reviewing three golf games really developed because, during our stay in the USA last year, we came across a wide variety of sports games of all types and descriptions. Such a variety, in fact, as buyers in England could never hope to see on the shelves of English shops. There must be at least twenty American football games available commercially in the States, almost as large a number of basketball games, baseball games, hockey games - indeed virtually every sport you can think of is represented in board gameform. While I was in the USA I picked up one of the games reviewed below, and more recently Omar DeWitt brought over another for me. The third game, the only English one mentioned, I bought many years ago, hence my extreme vagueness on the current price and availability.

I believe that many wargamers suffer some marital discomfort because they can never persuade their wives either to tolerate their own playing of wargames or to participate in them themselves. This usually ends up in the usual woman's argument whereby the man always loses no matter which stance he takes. Indeed, rather than taking any stance at all, he would be better perambulating in the direction of beer, re-appearing later when the heat is presumed to be off. Non-wargames, of a non-trivial nature, constitute one way of combating female wiles; the AH game C&O B&O, the Stock Market game, and no doubt many of the 3M games, fall into the class of game which are sufficiently intriguing for a wargamer to want to give them time, yet short and relatively simple to permit non-adherents of the wargaming fraternity to participate. I believe that many households, which statistically consist of one wargamer, one annoyed wife, 1.35 cars and 43.72 children, could eventually develop into ones in which a wide variety of games is played across the whole intellectual spectrum. Wives will surely agree that this keeps the husband away from the pub; at least for part of the time. In addition this gives the female member of the household an excuse for demanding more housekeeping money, on the grounds of ruined table-tops, drinks purchased for the family etc. Be that as it may, here is a review on three golf games.

PAR-GOLF.

Ariel Productions.
Availability - I think so. Price - about £1.40 when I bought it some time ago.

THINKING MAN'S GOLF

3M (America).
Available anywhere in the USA for \$8.

Ask an American ALBION fiend to send it to you and arrange to pay him via ALBION, who will take a mere 150% commission. Discount houses usually carry games a lot cheaper than list.

CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF.

Championship Games.
Available in the US for \$10.

Presentation.

PAR-GOLF consists of a 24"x19" board, which has the course and shot marking designed on it, with space for playing cards (see rules). Quite an attractive board, really. You also get one set of Fairway cards, one set of Hazard cards, a set of score-sheets, rules and ball markers.

The whole thing is reasonably presentable - about the same standard as the games Waddingtons were producing five years ago for much the same price. I will pause here to have a cheap sneer at the picture adorning the box cover, which will probably do as much damage to sales to golfers as any other factor. One must mention a golfer, gazing avidly in one direction while his ball travels in another (that's a fair comment on my golf, but the game is announced as being for professionals); a sign pointing to the Ariel County Golf Club sticking up in the middle of the first fairway (presumably, if you have got that far, you would already have visited the clubhouse; if you are on the first fairway for nefarious purposes, you should be behind those trees anyway, and the sign should tell you where they are); a bunker which, at about 300 yards long, would qualify as the trap of all traps were it not for the fact that there isn't a fairway or green within sight; finally a windmill - not necessarily an incongruous sight on an English course, particularly in Norfolk etc. - but surely the vanes all need to be the same length, and they should surely all pass through the same central pivot?; the functioning of this machine must be of a severely questionable nature. Incidentally, the large golf ball portrayed on the box cover has Penfold written all over it; presumably this company had something to do with the production and promotion of the game.

THINKING MAN'S GOLF has the game components packed into a box, these consisting of a distance finder, club chart, score card, rules, a chinagraph pencil and a die. The course itself, which is completely enclosed in clear plastic, actually wraps round the box itself and thus forms a most attractive outside cover. As one might expect from 3M, the presentation is very good - a nice bright, clean package.

CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF comes in a plain box. The course is on five large cards, plastic laminated, a large clear acetate sheet enclosing the card in use at any one time. There is a shot board, whose use will be described later, a distance finder, dice, clubs, 'balls', rules etc. Nice presentation - the cost is the highest of the three, but the presentation (and the other virtues of the game, to be described) is quite adequate, even at the price. I should perhaps mention here that Omar, who brought me my copy of this game, scoured the discount houses and eventually purchased the game for \$2.50. This low price, although exceptional, is nevertheless an idea of the sort of discount possible.

Methods of Play.

When I first started playing golf at about the age of fifteen (is it really only seven years ago??), having fallen prey to the mystique of birdies, dormies, albatrosses, eagles and birds in general, I set out with a bright smile, a magnificent set of 53 clubs, motorised caddy-cart, and dressed in the right gear. But with no innate skill whatsoever. My career in golf was one of the most unremarkable known to the entire north of England, and was punctuated with some very un-Trevinoesque hacking on local and remote courses, spending large amounts on golf balls and green fees, and rarely having the satisfaction of getting the ball down the hole in anything near the number of shots recommended by Those Who Know These Things. After some years scrabbling in this manner I met my wife, who immediately beat me by three strokes on every hole in the first game we played. I have not played golf since. However I take some consolation that I can probably beat her at board golf games; I can't quite get round to putting this boast to the test, though.....

I have always been intrigued by the methods used by manufacturers in re-creating physical games on a board. Perhaps the only really worthwhile sports game produced in England is the Subbuteo Table Soccer game, which has reached some considerable status among players, and is followed with great enthusiasm by many adherents. This game has the advantage of demanding considerable physical skill as well as a fair amount of tactical expertise; even though, therefore, it does not exactly duplicate soccer in the physical processes used, it is sufficiently close to it in concept to be both a very worthwhile game and an excellent simulation. However every other sports game seems to lack more than a smattering of skill factor, and is so remote a physical parallel as to make it an unworthy simulation at all. These generally consist of little more than rolling a die and trusting to luck. I need hardly add that this isn't usually the case with American-produced sports games, where considerably more emphasis is given to the strategy and tactics of the original game, and sincere efforts are made to produce close simulations. However I think it is fair comment to say that no sports game, wherever produced, emulates the physical requirements of the players, with the single exception of Subbuteo mentioned above, and perhaps one of the golf games reviewed here (which one I leave to your judgement later).

Golf is, potentially, a very suitable subject for a table sports game, for a variety of reasons. First, the terrible golfer such as myself can gain considerably more prowess on the board than he possibly could out in the field, and at considerably less cost. Also, it is an admirable solitaire game - something which the games market sadly lacks. Thirdly, since the original game of golf is an individual game rather than a team game, its adaptation to a table format can be less complex than for games involving teams.

Nonetheless, as can be seen from the accounts below, the skill level of these games can vary considerably, from the trivial to the interesting and intriguing. The actual methods of play of the three games under review can now be given a look.

PAR-GOLF. The course consists of 18 holes (obviously) along which are laid numbered circles at varying distances from the tee and in different positions in relation to the centre of the fairway. A typical hole on the course (number 1, 427 yards, par 4) has the following numbered circles along the hole, counting from tee to green.

1. Red circle - topped drive.
2. Black circle - poor drive of 60 yards or so, but a reasonable lie.
3. Red starred circle - you have driven into the brook.
4. Black circle - a poor drive of 120 yards, just over the brook into a luckily good lie.
5. A red circle - on the edge of the brook, and a poor lie.
6. A red circle - good drive, but in a bunker on the left of the fairway.
7. A black circle - a good lie after a 240 yard drive.
8. A black circle - a good lie after a 270 yard drive.
9. A red circle in a bunker at about 320 yards.
10. A red circle indicating a bad lie under trees approaching the green.
11. A black circle on the fairway about 50 yards short of the green.
12. A red circle in a bunker to the left of the actual green.
13. The hole.
14. A black circle - a good lie just through the green.
15. A red circle - you have rolled through the green and into a bunker.

The procedure is as follows. A player selects the club to be played from a club card, which gives average distances. The club card is split into amateur and professional categories, the latter giving longer distances and better accuracy, so that the player can decide before the round which he will try. Taking the amateur categories, starting from the first tee, the club card would give the average length of a drive as 7 - i.e. given a normal shot, the black circle numbered 7 in the above list would be reached. Having identified the club, a card is drawn from the pack of Fairway cards, the distance noted and the ball marker moved accordingly. This procedure is followed until the distance indicated by the shot card shows that the green has been reached. If a player starts a shot from a black circle, the Fairway cards are used which give close-to-predicted distances; if the previous shot has gone aglay, and the player starts his shot from a red circle, the Hazard pack is used, which give a much wider variation of distances. This procedure gives a rough approximation to the concept of good and poor lies. Putting is done simply by drawing a card.

THINKING MAN'S GOLF. The player selects a club to be used, and lays out on the course a clear acetate distance finder, the centre-line of which is laid along the line he wishes the shot to travel. Having declared the club (and again average yardage is given on the club card) the player rolls two dice and matches the roll with the club selected, giving the distance from the striking point which the ball travels. He then rolls the dice again, and matches this roll on the direction chart, to find out how far his shot has deviated from the straight line he set on the distance finder. The direction chart is so arranged that small deviations are less probable than large ones, although it is possible to deviate by as much as 50 yards from the intended line. The distance travelled and the deviation are plotted on the direction finder and the position of the ball marked on the course itself using the chinagraph pencil. This procedure is followed until the green is reached; each green is laid out in a number of ovals, each representing a particular contour distance from the hole. To putt, the player rolls two dice and matches the roll on a putting chart against the oval in which the ball lay. This gives the number of putts required to hole out. There are various rules for playing out of bad lies, from under trees and from sand traps. There is also a wind effect and a means of playing chip shots if within a certain distance from the green, using a special table and two dice.

CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF. The position of the ball on the course is marked in much the same way as in THINKING MAN'S GOLF. However the means of getting to that position is considerably different. Whereas in previous cases random devices were used to find the position of the ball after the shot, in this game one actually 'hits' a 'ball' with a 'club' along the shot board, which is a large card, plastic laminated, and calibrated with a set of appropriate distances for a variety of clubs. The ball is in fact a thick metal washer, with one smooth flat surface suitable for easy sliding along the shot board, and the club is a metal spatula-like object. The player selects which club he wants, then hits the ball along the shot board. This gives the distance travelled in the air by the ball, by noting in which sector on the shot board the ball comes to rest. There are also markings to indicate deviations from the centre line. This distance is then noted on the course as being the point where the ball lands. The amount of roll after landing is determined by rolling three dice and consulting a table, which gives varying distances of roll according to the club used and the score on the dice. The two figures are added together and the eventual position of the ball noted, with the important addition that what happens to the ball between landing and actually coming to rest can be determined (e.g. a trap could lie in such a position as to catch the ball rolling after it has landed). This procedure is repeated.

Various rules dictate conditions for playing from bunkers, from bad lies, from under trees etc. When the green is reached, much the same procedure is used for putting. The greens are marked out in concentric circles, with centre at the hole, each circle representing a contour distance of 15 feet from the hole. Putting procedure is to note in which circle the ball lies, then rolling three dice to determine exact putting distance. Say the ball came to rest between the second and third circles out from the hole; this means it is 30+ feet from the hole, the additional footage being determined by the die roll. If a nine is rolled on three dice, the distance required to putt is 39 feet. This distance must then be putted out on the shot board using the putter markings, which are in feet. It will be seen that, in contradiction to the other games, CHAMPIONSHIP golf imposes quite a severe demand, in skill rather than stamina, on the player. It isn't easy to judge distances on the shot board.

Comparisons and judgements.

PAR-GOLF is the simplest game of the three. It is totally un-complex and demands very little thought of the player. The rules are simple enough for play by young people - even wargamers' wives. If you are a golfer, and interested in reproducing on the board some of the skills demanded by the game itself, then PAR-GOLF will not hold much excitement for you. However it is quite a pleasant little game, easy to understand and to play, and demanding no extremes of skill or thought. From this point of view (alone) it is a better 'family' game than either of the other two. Clearly there are many approximations in this mode of play; for instance no account is taken of obstacles such as trees, the height of a shot, the difference between the length of a shot and the subsequent roll after landing, the difficulty of playing out of some lies which are worse than others, etc. It is very much a black-or-white game, where one is either faced with a lousy shot or a good one, and one has little control over the outcome of the shot. It should be noted here that the cards have been carefully planned so as to give sensible outcomes over a large number of games. Thus amateur games tend to be rather slapdash affairs, with quite a few bad scores and a fair proportion of exceptional ones, a wide margin in between; professional scores tend to cluster more closely about the average, exceptionally low or high scores being unusual. Clearly some thought was given to the construction of the packs, and each card is numbered to make replacement easy in case of loss.

THINKING MAN'S GOLF is a trifle more elaborate mechanically, but is relatively speedy and simple to play. This very much represents the middle-of-the-road game of the trio. There is a little bit of skill involved, since the outcome of each shot is governed by known probabilities, and a player can therefore do some reasonably accurate prediction of how much risk he can take, where he expects to end up after a shot. However reasonably wide outcomes can be obtained for a shot, and the player has no control, say, over whether his drive is going to deviate by 50 yards from the line he sets, and this is a pretty hefty deviation by anyone's standards. The rules are a little more elaborate than those of PAR-GOLF - for instance notice is taken of large and small trees, and the distance one must be from these obstacles in order to be able to play over them without risk of entanglement. They also deal with playing from bunkers in a different way to playing from rough - an attempt to recreate the real differences. PAR-GOLF just treats a poor lie as a poor lie, and that is that; THINKING MAN'S GOLF at least tries to make a minor distinction. The putting mechanics are very poor, being governed

completely by the roll of two dice. In addition, there is a similar table for close chip shots, which requires no skill at all on the part of the player.

CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF is mechanically rather more awkward, for two reasons. First, the shots have to be played on the shot board, and the size of the shot board and of the course itself demands that quite a considerable area should be available so that each player can get access to the shot board. Secondly, the hole in play has to be changed every so often, and this requires a couple of minutes to re-align the structure; only a minor nuisance, however. The rules are very clear and comprehensible. This is very much a skill game. Devotees of the game shove-ha'penny will know how difficult the game is, and how much practice is required to master it; playing a shot in CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF requires a good deal of skill and fine judgement in order to get the ball running nicely down the middle to maximum distance. Actually, we found we played a better line in this game than expected - i.e. I didn't deviate as much from the required line as I do on a real golf course; this I modestly attribute to the skill with which I play the board game, but in all fairness I must admit that it is relatively easy to keep a shot straight, the difficulty coming in getting the right length. Perhaps there is a case for the narrowing of the deviations on the shot board and the direction finder, or for sub-dividing the markings into smaller parcels, so that more gradation is obtained between a straight shot and one which ends up in the vicar's garden. Rules for playing over trees, out of traps and rough, and from poor lies are clear and reasonable approximations.

Summary.

There is no doubt that CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF is by far the most realistic of the three, the most demanding in skill, the most expensive, and perhaps the best presented. THINKING MAN'S GOLF is not so far behind in price and presentation, but is streets behind in realism, and tends to seem rather a poor relation. PAR-GOLF is aimed at an entirely different market - the family - and within this limited respect attains its objectives; however it is nothing more than a pretty trivial game, fun to play, but without much in the way of lasting qualities. THINKING MAN'S GOLF tends to fall between the two stools, trying to compete in both fields; it isn't as authentic a game as CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF, nor is it quite as good for the family as is PAR-GOLF.

The overall recommendation is, therefore - if you want a realistic golf game, CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF will give you a lot; if you want to potter around the course with the family, then PAR-GOLF isn't a bad vehicle. If you want to get a taste of both, then you could buy THINKING MAN'S GOLF, but I don't recommend it; you would get second best either way.

Postscript.

It won't have escaped the attention of readers that two of the three games in this review are American in origin, nor that the skill level of these games is considerably in excess of that of the British game (as far as I am aware, this is the only golf game produced in Britain, omitting for the purposes of this discussion card games of an extraordinarily trivial variety). Of course, the prices are higher for the American games too, but the presentation amply justifies the price. In fairness to Ariel, when they first produced PAR-GOLF the field of plastic laminates was little more than experimental, and if they were to produce the game afresh now, the methods of marking the position of the ball would probably be considerably different. Are we to assume, therefore, that there is no market in England for expensive,

well-researched sports games of the type exemplified by CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF? Certainly Subbuteo Table Soccer is the only worthwhile soccer game available over here, and this is a fine state of affairs in a country with such a large soccer-orientated populace. There doesn't seem to be a comparable cricket game available at all, for instance. Apparently, as is the case with board wargames, manufacturers seem reluctant to investigate the market since they believe there is no market at all. Sales of games from Decalset and CHD might indicate that there might be more of a market than previously suspected, and the same could be said for sports games. Were CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF available over here, at a reasonable price (say £3.50 - which isn't far off the American price of \$10.00) I am willing to bet it would go well, particularly if it were given the right exposure (in golf clubs, for instance, where it would make a change from snooker and darts). Isn't anyone going to give it a try?

Don Turnbull.

* * * * *

STRATEGY AND TACTICS - a brief look at issue 27.

There isn't space for a full review of this issue, but we can cram in some information.

The game is Battle for France 1940, which is looked at briefly elsewhere in this ALBION.

Other articles are:

- Campaign Analysis - the Allied Bomber Offensive.
- Campaign Analysis - Alexander.
- Campaign Analysis - the Fall of France 1940.
- Outgoing Mail - the editorial.
- Sackson on Games.
- Tactical Notes (notes on PanzerBlitz).
- Pass in Review.

Yes - I agree; far too much of the Campaign Analysis, and far too little on games. Someone wrote me recently (can't place who - my apologies) to say that it's about time Strategy and Tactics magazine included something more in the spirit of the title of the magazine. Of course we don't want 'perfect plans' but we do want more information on games; I suspect few people are more than marginally interested in campaign analyses.

Even Sid Sackson's column is poor this time - it consists of a list of new games, some of which he will no doubt review in future issues. And there is no Diplomacy column - indeed, the future of this column seems in some considerable doubt. No GAGE review - in fact nothing on games at all except for the one-page Tactical Notes on PanzerBlitz.

All in all we rate this as the least interesting issue for some time. The game may save it (games have saved issues before, in our opinion) but there isn't enough written material to hold the interest of anyone not fascinated by organisation etc. (the material of the campaign analysis articles). Of course, no-one expects S&T to be uniformly excellent all the time, and we have had some really excellent issues in this past. But this issue is a bomb, unlikely to have lasting value to more than a few readers.

It has come to my ears that another magazine is being started in the USA, and all indications are that it is intended as a rival to S&T. The title is apparently Tactics And Variants. I know nothing more than these bare details, but will keep my ears to the ground and let you know what I find out. Any offers of news from across the Atlantic?

letterslettersletterslettersletterslettersletterslettersletterslettersle

From Harald Sonesson, Sturevagen 8, S-182 74 Stocksund, Sweden.

Dear Don,

This morning, when on my way to my summer office-work, I noticed a terrible smell just around our mail-box; could it be? IT WAS! My long-awaited copy of the world's most outstanding rubbish had arrived. I noticed one, two and even three colours (S&T here we come), but I must confess I didn't like Pam's back cover ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~!!!!??

Yours, Harald.

**** Harald hasn't exactly been idle lately; through the mail a couple of weeks ago came the first issue of the newsletter of the Scandanavian Wargaming Society, of which group Harald (heavily disguised as Donald Duck) is apparently prime mover. Nice to see things moving, Harald, and Pam has always wanted to go to Sweden.....

djt ****

From Dave Taylor, 171 Lodge Lane, Hyde, Cheshire.

Dear Don,

Glad you found TRIREME to be an enjoyable game - I would have hated to have been the cause of you buying a game that you eventually decided was pathetic (like Campaign). Wind direction and strength rules occur in the advanced rules. About 'average' dice. Back in the days when table-top gaming was getting started, the normal method of computing casualties for a volley of infantry fire was to roll a normal die. To the score shown points were added or subtracted depending on the range, whether the target was in cover, spread out etc., the final score being the number of enemy soldiers removed from the table. It was soon realised that ordinary dice gave too wide a spread of results - the best 'shooting' giving a result six times better than the worst. Someone (John Tunstall and the London Wargames Section, I believe) came up with the so-called 'average dice'. The spread of results was reduced, the best results being now only two and a half times as good as the worst - much more realistic. At the same time, since the average of the two dice was the same, no other change had to be made to the existing rules. After all, after ten volleys (with no additions or subtractions) both types of dice would, on average, have removed 35 soldiers. However the spread around this expected result would be much less for average dice - hence the name. Hope this has enlightened you.

PanzerBlitz has just arrived - not had time to play a game yet, though (I'm still drooling over it - it's GREAT!).

Cheers, Dave.

**** This explanation has helped a lot, thanks to Dave. I knew there was something I should have known about average dice - this is it! Incidentally, I sent a copy of the last ALBION to Decalset, so that they could read the review of TRIREME and perhaps let me have comments. The response so far has been a stony silence - come on, fellows - the review wasn't that bad.

djt ****

From Stuart Clark, 84 Arkles Lane, Liverpool L4 2SP.

Dear Don,

Thanks for ALBION 30; now there was a good issue. I was particularly excited by the review of TRIREME and have now sent for it.

You may like to know that my letter in ALBION 29 provoked Rod Blackshaw to lend me his Waterloo, for which I am eternally grateful. Playing this has so whetted my appetite for AH material that I must try to get PanzerBlitz, so could you consider one of the four 'spoken for'?
Many thanks, Stuart.

**** No sooner said than done; Stuart will probably get his PanzerBlitz within days of this issue, if not before. Nice to see such a spirit of cameraderie starting to spring up between ALBION readers who have never met; that's what a hobby is all about. djt ****

From Adrian Brine, 40 Clovelly Road, Anfield, Liverpool 4.

Dear Don,

At last! A chance to build a Thousand-Year Reich! Having surrendered valuable geld to the G.P.O. in order to transport the enclosed postal order, I will proceed to bore you with my opinions on matters general and diverse. ALBION 29 was excellent; especially interesting was John Robertson's article. Reading the mistakes of real-life commanders makes one feel a little less ashamed of one's own errors of judgement. It seems a pity that we ALBION subscribers will be deprived of the AHIKS bulletin. Still, ALBION represents excellent value for money, and I'm sure you will keep us in touch with the activities of the Society. I look forward to the postal chess competition.
Sincerely, Adrian.

**** Adrian is playing Germany in the new game in COURIER, to clarify his first remark. I will certainly keep ALBION readers informed about AHIKS activities from time to time. Under normal circumstances, such activities, consisting of postal games between pairs of opponents, are not broadcast until a result is known. However AHIKS Europe holds twice-a-year meetings, and reports on these, and any other items of interest, will appear in ALBION, with the permission of the regional directors. djt ****

From Dennis Nixon, 49 Manor Street, Middlesbrough, Teesside TS1 4EY.

Dear Don,

Glad to see references to the game of Life in the current ALBION, and look forward to an article on it as I have played around with it quite a bit. The only suggestion I have to make is that a Go board and men (white and black) make excellent apparatus for the job.
Sincerely, Dennis.

**** Razzy's article in this issue on the Life game is purely introductory in nature - more interesting contributions will appear in future, I hope, now that the basic mechanics have been explained. In regard the Go board and pieces, you will see that Razzy made the same suggestion. Now did Razzy pinch the idea from Dennis, or vice versa??? You will never know, folks, except that I might confess to Dennis some day djt ****

From Charles Appleby, 2 Hulcote, Towcester, Northants.

Dear Don,

Sorry I was unable to write and tell you more about Strategy I for last month's issue, but with the arrival of PanzerBlitz this month there has hardly been time to write this. With any luck your copy of Strategy I will have arrived by now; anyway, here we go.

Basically Strategy I is a failure because it is not playable in its primary form - that of a multi-player game. In two-player games, complexity has been allowed to run unchecked, because at least 50% of the players (the owner of the game) knows the rules. True multi-player games are difficult with less than 5 players, so next minute less than 20% of the players know the rules! Admittedly, with a bit of luck you can get together a group who can manage one of the simpler (e.g. Ancients) games, but the modern ones are quite impossible. Don't imagine from this that the game is excessively complicated - it isn't - but the whole essence of multi-player stuff is simplicity: ideally a very simple combat/movement/points system, but with plenty of scope for ingenuity and subtlety - anyone for Diplomacy? Strategy I is extraordinarily naive in this respect.

The scenarios seem to have been skilfully assembled, but they are really only fit for two players. The lack of realism - in that the games are fictional - is a bit difficult to get used to.

By far the worst item in the game is the combat results system, which is for some reason simple. The only results on the pre-modern chart are straight eliminations and exchanges.

I would be interested to hear other opinions on the game, as perhaps I am rather prejudiced in view of the absolutely appalling one and only game I tried (five players), quite apart from some idiot flooding the counters with beer!

So, on to PanzerBlitz. I have just played a couple of games and am finding it really fascinating. Although there are obvious deviations from reality at points, the overall approximation is very good.

Sincerely, Charles.

**** Views on Strategy I, anyone? I don't know how many copies are in the country now, although I suspect only three or four.

ALBION Game Hint Number One always was 'never combine beer with a game opponent, particularly if said opponent happens to hail from north of the border and is called Watson.' djt ****

From Rod Walker, 5058 Hawley Boulevard, San Diego, California 92116, U.S.A.

Dear Don,

I cannot say that I relate as well to the new ALBION as to the old. It lacks a lot of the old wit and charm. My opinion is so because I do not like AH games at all. I would like to see more material such as the Hyper-tweedle series, or 'A British Idiot in America', and so on. Articles on Diplomacy by English players would be interesting. In any event, I would find less AH stuff more congenial. One solution is to segregate your war-games coverage, but that would be unfortunate. Many people are interested in all phases. One thing, in any event, is to reinject at least some of your tremendous wit that we used to receive so generously in the early issues. Would write more, but time presses.

Best, Rod.

**** This issue, with no Diplomacy at all, will be rated poorly by Rod - and quite right, too, from the point of view that ALBION purports to be something of a Diplomacy magazine. However it's the old Terrible Twins again - Balanced Diet and Available Material. We do our best to please everyone at least some of the time.
As to wit; it's nice to know that my inanities were appreciated in some quarters. But things don't come so easily these days. Maybe it's the darned Government, or the cost of living. I'll try. djt ****

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PANZERBLITZ - further clarifications. By Omar DeWitt.

**** ALBION 29 carried a series of rule clarifications for PanzerBlitz, supplied by Mike Malone. Omar DeWitt recently commented on the anomalies discovered in these clarifications. djt ****

I can't remember how the difficulty concerning the number of units on/in a fort arose; perhaps Mike got two of my letters mixed up, one with 'old' interpretations, one with revised versions.
Anyway, the first of the two interpretations concerning forts is misleading. If the Germans have three units IN a fort, they can also stack three units ON the fort, thus making a total stack of six units, or double the normal stack possible. The reasoning is simple - the units IN the fort are for the most part underground or dug into defences, while those ON the fort are in the adjacent area but not in the fort itself.

Omar DeWitt.

* * * * *

Miscellany.

Hartley Patterson is now acting as an information centre for Diplomacy in the UK, and feeding information to Rod Walker, the Diplomacy Division Chief of the NTFB Games Bureau. Hartley is also producing War Bulletin, which is just about to start its fourth game.

Players in the new ALBION games (71/7, a domestic game and 71/8, the seven-country game) are entering into the spirit of the thing with a vengeance. The first deadline has not yet been announced (it will be announced in COURIER 30B, published at the same time as this issue of ALBION), yet I have already had printed letterheads from two or three players, and even some Spring orders!

If plans discussed a couple of weeks ago bear fruit (and with Michael Nethercot in charge, that's a foregone conclusion), the centrepiece of the next AHKS Europe meeting will be a multi-commander, multi-board PanzerBlitz game, which should be most interesting. Arrangements for the whole affair are in the hands of Harry Tucker and Tony Jones, with Michael Nethercot performing his invaluable function as organiser of the multi-commander game.

Did you know that teachers are getting a 10% rise? 10% of what, I would like to know.....

Four copies of PanzerBlitz have been spoken for, but there might be one or two more available from me in a few weeks. Speak now, or for ever

ALBION Trades and Subscribers List - Additions etc.

Please make the following changes to the list. I had promised to print a complete up-dated list in this issue, but space is against me, so it will have to wait.

Note that some early numbers in the list have been re-allocated.

- 10. John Loughlin, 20 Ambleside Court, Cascade, Hengoed, Glamorgan.
S. (-26).
- 12. D. Wallis, 157 Hednesford Road, Cannock, Staffs.
S. (09).
- 52. Pete Rogers NOTE CHANGE OF ADDRESS TO 203 Sqdn., R.A.F. Luqa, Malta,
B.F.P.O.51.
- 89. Robert Kenny, 20 Grenfell Avenue, Saltash, Cornwall.
S. (£1.09).

Note also that sometimes we get new subscribers entering the lists with negative numbers in brackets after their names. This doesn't mean they are twisting the ALBION coffers out of vast amounts, but merely that the ALBION offices have not at the time got the affairs in order, and the figure in brackets is more for my reference.

A few people on the subscriber lists do, in fact, owe ALBION money. Although I trust you all dearly, cash wouldn't be a bad idea from time to time. And when the list is next printed in full, the evidence will be there for all to see. Bring back the stocks! Please take this in the spirit in which it is intended; I'm not grasping (much) and don't want ALBION to descend into commercial practices, but it's just a matter of keeping afloat....

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In the next ALBION:

Articles on chess by Rod Blackshaw (sorry - promised for this issue, but pushed out by lack of space) and V.R.Parton. And many other things, with

News

Reviews

Comments

Letters

Inanities

Maybe a report on Malcolm Watson's wedding.....

All this for only 10p!

Late Amendmerdments.

- 29. David Jones. Hasn't been heard of for months, and believed to be in the USA. Delete from lists. He owes ALBION 32p (I suppose it could have been worse).
- 46. Peter Robertson NOTE CHANGE OF ADDRESS to 82 Luddenham Close, Stanhope Estate, Ashford, Kent.

